

Applicants request the Examiner to contact the undersigned counsel for applicant if the prosecution of the present application can be expedited in any way.

BACKGROUND

In a significant aspect, the present invention facilitates purchase transactions via a computer network, such as the Internet. These transactions are facilitated by the invention in such a way that the accounting, attribution and distribution of monies or other value or consideration paid pursuant to the network-facilitated transaction can be effected dependably and accurately. Typically, these transactions are facilitated between and among a purchaser ("User"), an online Merchant having a Target Website, and one or more Affiliates. An Affiliate is typically a charity, such as Elizabeth Glaser's Pediatric AIDS Foundation. Thus, charitable contributions can be facilitated at the same time that purchasers ("Users") are obtaining desired merchandise, and Merchants are selling products or services via their respective websites.

Typically, the accounting function of the methods and software of the present invention is effected with respect to the money, value or other consideration transferred pursuant to the transaction, the attribution function is effected with respect to the Merchant, the Affiliate charity and the Purchaser ("User"), and the distribution function is effected with respect to all parties of the transaction. Thus, the distribution of monies, value or other consideration may take place in accordance with agreements between and among two or more of the parties or participants. In some embodiments of the invention, an Affiliate Manager acts to manage the transaction in such a way that the accounting, attribution and distribution functions are handled by this third-party Affiliate Manager.

Significant aspects of methods of the invention are facilitated primarily by software residing on the computer of a User, for example, a prospective consumer. In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a User downloads a software application for facilitating the invention in the form of one or more software modules that may be adapted and arranged as browser plug-ins. Typical software applications according to the invention, for example, for facilitating the BuyersPort® Network ("BPA"), Grow Hope®

Program OR Elizabeth Glaser's Pediatric AIDS "Buy into Hope Program" can be downloaded from a website, floppy disc, CD-ROM, or other digital media such as that provided when a new computer or Internet communication device is purchased. The BPA is adapted and arranged to reside on the User's computer, and to interact with one or more web browsers already situate on the User's device or computer, for example, with Internet Explorer or Netscape Explorer. The BPA comprises a Merchant Array, that is, a list of merchants participating, for example, in the BuyersPort® Network, like retailers such as Eddie Bauer, Staples or MegaToy. The BPA is configured to be updated periodically, for example, every day, or every several days.

Once in the BuyersPort® or Grow Hope® systems, The User issues an Initial Request to go to a merchant website (the "Target Website") typically via an Internet browser. After the browser has navigated the Initial Request to the target website, the BPA compares the domain name of the URL of the target website to the domain names contained within the Merchant Array provided within the BPA to determine if the Target Website is one of those listed in that Merchant Array. If the Target Merchant Website is indeed one of those listed in the Merchant Array, the BPA will cause the browser to again navigate to the Target Merchant's Website, but in the way necessary to identify that User as being a member of, for example, the Grow Hope® Program. This re-navigation is effected usually in one of two ways, depending upon whether an Affiliate Manager is involved in the transaction. Although one of these two methodologies is preferably used, within the concept and scope of the invention, any method of communicating the information necessary for performing the functions of the methods and software of the invention can be employed.

In one preferred embodiment where an Affiliate Manager is present, for example www.staples.com, the User's browser is re-navigated to an Affiliate Manager site by the BPA, with the address and Identifiers associated with that Merchant added as contained in the Merchant Array. An exemplary re-navigation would be: <http://bfast.growhope.com/bfast/click?bfmid=573112&siteid=40381905&bfpag=ho metext1>

The Affiliate Manager then forwards the User Request, often by way of a 302 redirect, to the Merchant's website with connection information necessary to identify the user as a Grow Hope® member. A forwarded User Request might be, for example:

**http://www.staples.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/home?jspStoreDir=Staples&cm_i
te=homepage&langId=-
1&cm_pla=40381905&sourceid=qIbKRHOMCzS%40Amgt0fHU&cm_ven=BFAST
&storeId=10001&siteid=0040381905&ddkey=StaplesBeFree**

The Merchant Target Website then tracks any purchase transactions made by that User and reports those transactions back to the affiliate manager with the associated identification code. In some preferred embodiments, the Affiliate Manager (BFAST in the above-given example) reports back to the one or more Affiliates (in this example, Grow Hope®) the amounts spent by the User (consumer) and the referral revenue earned by the Affiliate. Grow Hope® can then disperse the percentage of that revenue to the partner charitable Not-For-Profit organization.

In a preferred embodiment where no Affiliate Manager is present, the browser is re-navigated to the Merchant's Target Website with the address and Identifiers associated with that Merchant added as contained in the Merchant Array. An example of such a re-navigation

is:

**http://www.staples.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/home?jspStoreDir=Staples&cm_i
te=homepage&langId=-
1&cm_pla=40381905&sourceid=qIbKRHOMCzS%40Amgt0fHU&cm_ven=BFAST
&storeId=10001&siteid=0040381905&ddkey=StaplesBeFree**

The Merchant Target Website then tracks any purchase transactions made by the user and reports those transactions directly back to the affiliate with the associated identification code (in this, example, the Grow Hope® Program. Grow Hope® can then disperse the percentage of that revenue to the partner Not-For-Profit organization.

After the browser has been successfully navigated to the affiliated merchant with the necessary identification information to allow the Charitable organization to receive a percentage of any purchases, the user is notified in some way, for example by way of a sliding or fading message box or a flashing icon, that purchases made from this merchant will benefit the Charity. This provides benefit to the merchant by relaying to the customer (User) the willingness of the merchant to assist the customer's chosen charity by increasing the customer's willingness to purchase, and by associating the Merchant with that customer's chosen charity.

The present methods are thus advantageously dynamic in that they repeatedly examine and process requests to ensure that they contain an Affiliate Identifier or other information necessary to perform the desired functions of accounting, attribution and distribution. Thus, software modules of the invention are adapted to reside in the communication path between the User's browser and the Network Interface Connection ("NIC") such that, each time information passes through a module, the information is evaluated to determine whether the proper Affiliate identification information is included. The dynamic, or ongoing, nature of such evaluations ensures that proper credit is attributed in accordance with agreements between and among Affiliate referring sources, Merchants and charities, for example.

In the event that the target merchant website is not one of those listed in the Merchant Array, the BPA does not amend an identifier to the Initial Request but, instead, forwards the Initial Request to the target website. Advantageously, all of this is accomplished within milliseconds without the awareness of the user regarding the underlying process being necessary.